



*The Infoalert offers abstracts of current articles, mostly from US publications and by US authors, highlighting significant issues in five major areas of international or U. S. domestic affairs. Views expressed in the articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect U.S. government policies*

# *Infoalert*

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### DEMOCRACY AND GLOBAL ISSUES

**IA43** Brown, Lester **The New Geopolitics Of Food** (Foreign Policy, no. 186, May/June 2011, pp. 54-63) Currently available online at [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/04/25/the\\_new\\_geopolitics\\_of\\_food](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/04/25/the_new_geopolitics_of_food)

In this issue of FP magazine devoted to food, the author, president of the Earth Policy Institute, notes that rising global prices for staples do not affect those in the Western industrialized countries as much as they do in developing countries. For Americans, who spend less than one-tenth of their income in the supermarket, the soaring food prices are an annoyance, not a calamity. But for the planet's poorest 2 billion people, who spend 50%-70% of their income on food, rising prices may mean going from two meals a day to one. From the Middle East to Madagascar, high prices are spawning land grabs and ousting dictators. Brown says that's why the food crisis of 2011 is for real, and why it may bring with it yet more bread riots and revolutions. The result is a world that looks strikingly different from the bountiful global grain economy of the last century. Farmers now face increasing pressure of population growth; each year 80 million additional people must be fed, nearly all of them in developing countries.

**IA44** AA11140 Tenner, Edward **THE OTHER GLOBAL TOXIC CLOUD: CHINA'S POLLUTION** (The Atlantic, March 18, 2011) Currently available online at <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/03/the-other-global-toxic-cloud-chinas-pollution/72722/>

Many people in North America are worried about the drifting fallout from the Japanese nuclear reactor catastrophe, but the health risks are small compared to the mercury and other pollutants China's manufacturing and power generation are pumping into the air, writes Tenner, historian and founding advisor of the Smithsonian Institution's Lemelson Center. Some of this atmospheric pollution settles into the waters of the North Pacific, but much of it eventually merges with the global air pollution pool that circumnavigates the planet and can reach North America within days. These contaminants are implicated in a long list of health problems, and although China is taking positive environmental steps, the momentum of its growth threatens to swamp them: China now emits more mercury than the United States, India and Europe combined. Pollution knows no boundaries: the Environmental Protection Agency estimates that just one-quarter of U.S. mercury emissions from coal-burning power plants are deposited within the U.S. itself, and the remainder enters the global cycle. Conversely, current estimates are that less than half of all mercury deposition within the United States comes from American sources.

### **IA45 Cose, Ellis. Meet The New Optimists** (Newsweek online, May 15, 2011)

Available online at <http://www.newsweek.com/2011/05/15/meet-the-new-optimists.html>

The economic crisis may be depressing for most Americans, but African-Americans remain amazingly upbeat, according to polls. Blacks were more likely than whites to say the economy was sound, according to CBS News. A Washington Post-Kaiser-Harvard poll conducted earlier this year found that 60 percent of blacks, compared to 36 percent of whites, believe that the standard of living will be better for their children. Obama's presidency has fueled optimism among many blacks, but even before Obama's election, the new generation of black achievers refused to believe they would be stymied by the bigotry that bedeviled their parents.

### **IA46 Gandel, Stephen. A Surprising Jobs Recovery: American**

**Manufacturing Is Back** (Time Magazine online, May 16, 2011) Currently available online at <http://curiouscapitalist.blogs.time.com/2011/05/16/a-surprising-jobs-recovery-american-manufacturing-is-back/>

Despite a lackluster economic rebound, manufacturing in the United States has, for the first time in decades, seen an increase. Nearly one in every six jobs that has been created since the beginning of 2010 has been in manufacturing – and additional 240,000 workers in total. The recovery of U.S. manufacturing is due in part to the weak dollar and increased foreign demand for U.S. construction and agricultural machinery and building supplies. As a result, in the first quarter of 2011, U.S. manufacturing output grew by 9 percent, or five times as fast as the overall economy. Even so, manufacturing – with its comparatively well-paying jobs – makes up only 9 percent of the workforce, down from 16 percent at the beginning of the 1990s.

### **IA47 Hughes, David. Will Natural Gas Fuel America In The 21st Century? (Post Carbon Institute Report, May 29, 2011)**

Available online (PDF, 93mb) at <http://www.postcarbon.org/report/331901-report-will-natural-gas-fuel-america>

The author, a Canadian energy expert and geoscientist formerly with the Geological Survey of Canada, notes that natural gas is being hailed as a promising “bridge fuel” between high-carbon fuel sources and renewable energy, largely on the basis of horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing technologies to tap into previously inaccessible deposits of shale gas. Hughes writes that shale gas wells are costly, both in financial and energy terms, and carry much greater environmental risks than conventional gas wells; because of this, the full-cycle greenhouse gas emissions of shale gas are almost as high as coal. The most promising areas for drilling are much smaller than originally anticipated. Hughes notes that shale gas wells experience very high depletion rates, often as much as 85% in the first year, forcing an accelerating treadmill of drilling just to keep production from falling. In the face of declining gas production in North America, Hughes warns that we have “placed all our eggs in the shale gas basket”, and that strategies for energy sustainability must focus on reducing energy demand and optimizing the use of combustible fuels.

## INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

**IA48** Alter, Jonathan. **Woman Of The World** (Vanity Fair, June 2011) Currently available online at

<http://www.thenation.com/article/159279/my-monster-my-self-nicholas-carr-and-william-powersnityfair.com/politics/features/2011/06/hillary-clinton-201106>

Hillary Rodham Clinton, now in her ninth year as America's most admired woman, is "in her element" dealing with foreign upheaval not seen since the fall of the Soviet Union. President Obama chose her as Secretary of state because "she represents the United States better than anyone but him," this lengthy portrait claims. In the two and a half years on the job, she has visited 80 countries. She and President Obama agree that "one-size-fits-all" foreign policy will not work. Staffers note that both Obama and Hillary are methodical, deductive thinkers who drill down into a problem. But in an interview, she acknowledged that most problems are never solved. "You just keep working at them and working at them and working at them," Clinton said.

**IA49** Goldberg, Jeffrey. **Danger: Falling Tyrants** (Atlantic Monthly, June 2011)

Currently available online at <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2011/06/danger-falling-tyrants/8493/>

Preserving U.S. access to oil may require the Obama administration to call for more democracy in some countries in the Middle East while propping up monarchs in others, according to Goldberg. The trajectories of the Middle East's revolutions are still difficult to discern, and it is not clear yet that tyranny, is, in fact, in permanent eclipse. Goldberg notes that some ruling regimes may need to be propped up to counterbalance the major threat facing the U.S. in the region, Iran. He believes that the U.S. should pay close attention to the Muslim brotherhood, which has a number of autonomous branches of varying degrees of radicalism. The Arab revolution has created some fracturing along ideological lines within the Muslim Brotherhood, but Goldberg notes that it is adept at playing politics and ducking hard questions.

## U.S. SOCIETY & VALUES

**IA50** Stap, Don. **Grains Of Change** (Audubon, March-April 2011)

California's Central Valley once held vast wetlands populated by numerous bird and other wildlife species until agriculture destroyed 99 percent of this natural habitat, turning the rich soil into lucrative farms and ranches. But extensive rice farming is bringing back the wetlands, and birds such as the Long-billed Curlew are returning to this man-made habitat. Many farmers now incorporate conservation techniques and replace damaging practices like incinerating rice straw with natural, earth-friendly methods. It works for the farmers, and biologists from the Point Reyes Bird Observatory report that the Curlew population -- among others -- has rebounded.

**IA51** Greenberg, Gary. **My Monster, My Self: On Nicholas Carr And William Powers** (The Nation, March 16, 2011) Currently available online at

<http://www.thenation.com/article/159279/my-monster-my-self-nicholas-carr-and-william-powers>

The author, a therapist, notes that cell phones and the Internet have made the young fundamentally different than older adults and are redefining the meaning of a good life and what it means to be human. Nicholas Carr, in *THE SHALLOWS* and William Powers, in *HAMLET'S BLACKBERRY*, attempt to tell us who we are becoming now that we swim in an endless stream of

digital data. Their books are in part confessional accounts of their discovery of their dependence on their cell phones and how the online life has changed them. Once upon a time, enlightenment philosophers and scientists encouraged us to think of ourselves as the source of meaning and reading was central to this. But now reading has been supplanted, as Carr puts it, by “the speedy, superficial skimming of information” culled from the links generated by a Google search, which discourages “any deep, prolonged engagement with a single argument, idea, or narrative.” The space for contemplation disappears in the digital frenzy, and with it the necessity, and the possibility, of reflection. Constantly in the digital crowd, we are deprived of depth and substance, even when we don’t know it. With every Google search or friend request or tweet or stolen look at your BlackBerry, you are that much more firmly plugged into the collective and that much less in touch with yourself. Some scientists have found that daily use of digital devices “stimulates brain cell alteration.” Overtaxation by the flood of information makes us more susceptible to distraction and less able to experience emotion. If we want to preserve the health of our brains, the author believes, we will carve out a “peaceful spot where contemplativeness can work its restorative magic.”